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## Article

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## Ethiopia 1885 in Reclus's *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*\*

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### Geography or an "invitation to travel"<sup>1</sup>

Encyclopaedias which seem to be more and more in favour with the public contribute to spread the idea that geography is an invitation to travel. I was in this frame of mind when I compiled the chapters on Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa in the recent *Géographie Universelle* edited by Roger Brunet. Following this tradition in the French approach to Geography I decided to look carefully at the material written by my predecessors. I started with Élisée Reclus's *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* published from 1876 to 1894. Besides the reputation of its author volume X *L'Afrique septentrionale, première partie, bassin du Nil, Soudan égyptien, Éthiopie, Nubie, Égypte* has an additional interest: it was published in 1885 at a time when Ethiopia's existence as an independent state was threatened.

It took a long time before travellers' accounts were used by the *Géographies Universelles* and were finally assimilated by academic geography! The continuing success of *Géographies Universelles* in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century prolonged the vogue for travel books which were published (often illegally), copied and translated<sup>2</sup> throughout the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century. In short, it seems that because they wrote too many *Géographies Universelles* the French were slow to produce "scientific" Geography: by this I mean a geography which went beyond a description or an inventory of the Earth and suggested an explanation for the location and distribution of human activities, their regularities or irregularities. In his *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* É. Reclus has invented new methods: he did not limit himself any more to compile travel books but he has initiated geographical analyses of the world populations and territories.

\* Translated by Bernard Liger.

<sup>1</sup> From Charles Baudelaire's famous poem.

<sup>2</sup> James Bruce's books were very early translated into French. It was a tremendous success.

### 1. An unrecognized or forgotten “géographe communard”<sup>3</sup>?

Élisée Reclus (1830–1905) was together with Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845–1918), the founding father of Geography in French. He is less known than his younger colleague, he was almost forgotten for a century because of his political commitment. He was a self-taught geographer who produced his work in exile because of his anarchist militancy.

É. Reclus's life history was far from ordinary: he was born in Sainte-Foy-la-Grande near Bordeaux. His father, a clergyman, sent him on foot with one of his brothers to Coblenz/Koblenz in Germany in order to attend a school run by the Moravian Brothers. He developed a passion for geography in Berlin where he translated into French part of Carl Ritter's work. He was in France during the 1848 Revolution and became an atheist and an anarchist militant. He was exiled by Napoleon III and took refuge in England, in the United States and in Colombia. In 1857 an amnesty allowed him to return to France where he wrote *La Terre. Description de la vie du globe* in 1868. He actively supported the Commune of Paris in 1871 and had to flee into exile again, this time in Switzerland and Belgium. There this tireless polygraph published the 19 volumes of the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*, *La Terre et les hommes* from 1876 to 1894 and the 6 volumes of *L'homme et la Terre* from 1905 to 1908.

Despite his contribution to the advancement of learning this “géographe communard” and eternal exile never held any academic position in France. His native country did not acknowledge him till the May 1968 disturbances (Nicolas, 1984, pp. 51–52; Claval, 1998, pp. 80–86)! Anti-establishment students and teachers were the first to refer to his work and to his thought. In 1984 the *Maison de la Géographie* in Montpellier used his name as an acronym for the *Groupement d'Intérêt Public* (G.I.P.) in charge of its publication department. This *Réseau d'Étude des Changements dans les Localisations et les Unités Spatiales* (or R.E.C.L.U.S.) published the *Géographie Universelle* under the supervision of Roger Brunet from 1990 to 1995. Quite a tardy tribute!

Élisée Reclus who never visited Africa during his wandering life drew his basic inspiration from the accounts of travellers and explorers and from the first geographical studies where scientific approach was still tainted by the attraction of exoticism. His brothers<sup>4</sup> who were geographers and explorers like himself kept him well-informed of the latest territorial discoveries and ethnological studies (Claval 1998, p. 83). It is a fact that until the 1930s most

<sup>3</sup> As he called himself in his correspondence (Nicolas, 1984, *op. cit.*).

<sup>4</sup> Élie, Onésime and Armand were his collaborators and his co-authors.

of the prominent academic social scientists did not regard “field research”<sup>5</sup> as essential. Does such a shortcoming entitle us to challenge and dismiss the works of our predecessors? Today we seem to be obsessed with live reporting, personal accounts and exclusive pictures ... under the influence of the media. Yet many journalists are misled or mistaken and fail to observe the facts although they were eyewitnesses just as Stendhal’s character<sup>6</sup> Fabrice was present at Waterloo and saw nothing of the battle. But geography cannot be reduced to an “*invitation au voyage*” or to travel writing: it is much more.

## 2. Ethiopia and/or Abyssinia: “an African Europe”?

Élisée Reclus made an exhaustive study of the accounts written by the travellers who had visited Ethiopia since James Bruce<sup>7</sup>. He cleverly showed on his maps the routes followed by the d’Abbadie brothers, Ferret and Galinier, Stern, Munzinger, Raffray, Combes and Tamiser, Rohlf, Stecker, Burton, Massaia, Cecchi and Taurin. It is interesting to notice that the grid formed by these itineraries is less dense the further South we go towards the desert regions which were still *terra incognita* in 1885. Élisée Reclus supplemented his data with reports published by the British following Napier’s expedition to Mäqdäla in 1868. He did not use any photographs and his text was illustrated by engravings of landscapes, towns (Adwa, Məṣəwa, Gondär) and “typical” characters. Except for a map of vegetation levels inspired by the d’Abbadie brothers he only drew location maps which were often accurate at least for the Northern regions. He used the technique of thin hachures in order to clearly delimit hydrographic basins as it used to be done in 19<sup>th</sup> century atlases. He also included smaller regional maps on a wide scale and town plans (Gondär, Aksum, Ankobär, Harär). The chapter dealing with Ethiopia and extending in places to Upper Nubia covered 150 pages, substantially more than the 31 pages I was allocated for the whole of the Horn of Africa in the recent *Géographie Universelle* (Gascon, 1994).

Considering the question of the name Ethiopia/Abyssinia Élisée Reclus noted: “Le nom d’Éthiopie [...] a changé de valeur pendant le cours des siècles. [...] il a servi à désigner l’ensemble du continent africain” (p. 193). After tracing the origin of the term back to Herodotus he continued: “De nos jours, il n’est revendiqué que pour les contrées montagneuses formant le faite

<sup>5</sup> Jules Sion did not visit the Far East before writing his contribution to Vidal de la Blache’s *Géographie Universelle*! Marcel Mauss who was among the founders of French anthropology did not do field research.

<sup>6</sup> In Stendhal’s famous novel: *La Chartreuse de Parme*.

<sup>7</sup> He neither mentioned nor quoted Job Ludolph’s *Historia Aethiopica* where geographical data was given.

de l'écoulement entre la mer Rouge, le golfe d'Aden et le Nil moyen. Ce pays est celui auquel les Arabes donnent le nom d'Habech (*sic*), francisé en celui d'Abyssinie" (p. 194). He tackled the etymological problem and added: "Éthiopien, ainsi se désigne fièrement, conscient d'un long passé de gloire, l'habitant des plateaux d'où descendent le fleuve Bleu et les autres affluents du Nil" (p. 194). He recalled that: "[...] le nom d'Abyssinie, comme celui d'Allemagne et tant d'autres qui ne sont pas ceux que les habitants eux-mêmes donnent à leur pays, a pris à l'étranger force d'usage dont il faut tenir compte pour rester compris" (p. 194). Reclus showed how it was vain to look for precise limits and suggested: "[...] dans l'usage ordinaire, le nom d'Abyssinie est employé dans le sens politique et ce sont les armées du "roi des rois" qui en marquent les limites" (p. 194). Later he explained that: "[...] que toute la contrée, de forme triangulaire, qui se dresse entre la mer Rouge et le Nil, au dessus d'un socle de mille mètres d'élévation, constitue la véritable Éthiopie" (p. 195). This is a long way from the sterile debate about "natural borders".

After a 5 page introduction Élisée Reclus devoted almost 90 pages to "Abyssinia proper" and 48 pages to "Šäwa, the country of the Danakils and the Northern Galla States". Then, a few pages on "Upper Nubia" dealt with the lowlands shared nowadays by Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea. We notice at once that because of the material he used, his description of "Abyssinia proper" – the highlands North of Šäwa – is twice as long as that of the South of present day Ethiopia. The interest of Europeans for the North, its monuments in Aksum and Gondär and its Christian Semitic language-speaking population of plough cereal cultivators was the cause of this imbalance with the South, an "Ethiopia without monuments" (Gascon, 1995). This bias was increased further when Yohannēs IV established his government in Mäqäle. Élisée Reclus told us on several occasions what he really felt about Ethiopia "[...] elle offre [...] dans son développement intime une analogie remarquable avec l'Europe tempérée" (p. 195). "À certains égards, le Habech est une Europe africaine" (p. 196). In a letter to his family sent from Tadjourah on February, 28<sup>th</sup> 1886, Arthur Rimbaud expressed the same feeling: "[...] les monts d'Abyssinie, qui est la Suisse africaine sans hivers et sans étés: printemps et verdure perpétuelle et l'existence gratuite et libre" (Rimbaud, 1963: lettre CXXIV, p. 426).

Nevertheless, a few pages later Élisée Reclus brought a few restrictions to his comparison: "Quoique les Éthiopiens soient au nombre des peuples "civilisés"<sup>8</sup>, leur agriculture est encore à l'état rudimentaire" p. 243). He expressed his doubts again when he quoted Munzinger: "[...] le Nakfa (*sic*), 'la plus aimable contrée de l'Abyssinie' serait un pays propre à toutes cultures, cafiers

<sup>8</sup> Quotation marks are from Élisée Reclus.

(sic), cotonniers, mûriers, vignes et tabac” (Werner Munzinger, *Petermann’s Mitteilungen*, 1872, n° VI quoted p. 207). Reclus did not create the image of “wealthy Ethiopia”, a land of plenty, which was systematically shown by authors eager for land to be colonized (Gascon, 1999). And yet Werner Munzinger who acted as pacha of the region during Egyptian rule provided a very bad example with Naqfa. This town now a symbol of Eritrean independence belongs undoubtedly to the semi-arid and hostile lowlands of Sahel (Kutschera, 1994, pp. 70–79). Furthermore Élisée Reclus was not a supporter of European colonization. On the contrary he was a severe critic of it when he denounced the “soudanite” epidemics in *L’Homme et la terre* (1903–1905). At the time, public opinion was outraged by the crimes committed by colonial armies but the government explained that the officers suffered sudden attacks of madness caused by the heat of the tropical sun. For him it meant more: “[...] le pouvoir absolu exercé sur des êtres considérés comme étant à peine des hommes et sans qu’on ait à craindre le jugement d’un égal ...” could explain these abominations. As a rational anarchist he added: “Organisée pour le mal, l’armée ne peut fonctionner que pour le mal” (quoted by Marconis, 1996, p. 76).

### 3. The emancipation of Geography from the accounts of travellers

Reclus who was a man of principles and commitment and a scathing writer could have used his talent and his readers to denounce the Government or the Church or to mock “superstitions”. He may have once lapsed into a hasty conclusion: “Comme les mahométans, ils [les Fälaša] sont en général très supérieurs aux chrétiens, leurs maîtres, pour la moralité (sic)” He added: “Bien différents des autres juifs, ceux d’Éthiopie n’ont aucun goût pour le commerce: ils sont artisans [...]; il en est aussi qui s’occupent d’agriculture ou de l’élève du bétail” (p. 231). Doubtless he wanted to oppose those who like *abbé* Grégoire<sup>9</sup> or Joseph Halévy<sup>10</sup> wanted to regenerate the Jews, particularly Oriental Jews. Élisée Reclus appropriately reminded us that the Fälaša were oppressed by the kings of kings and engaged in a wide range of professions apart from trade.

We can find very few factual mistakes in Reclus’s texts which are, however, more than a century old. Altitudes of mountains in the South were exaggerated or confused with those in Kenya; estimations were more accurate for the

<sup>9</sup> He was rewarded by the Académie de Metz (France) in 1788 for his *Essai sur la régénération physique, morale et politique des juifs*. He was a member of the *Assemblée Constituante* (1789–91), the constitutional bishop of Blois and a member of the *Convention* (1792–95).

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Reclus p. 321.

Northern Highlands. But, we doubt that armies would have perished in snowstorms and that there would have been persistent snow. The courses of the Omo-Gibé, of the Wabi Shabeele (Šabäle) and of the Jubba rivers and of certain of their tributaries were not known at the time and there are some minor mistakes. We know now that not all the red soils are lateritic: pedologists no longer consider this soil classification as accurate. Although the introduction of potatoes could be regarded as a failure in 1885 it proved to be a great success later but É. Reclus could not have imagined it. Overall, the author was pretty accurate.

We are impressed by the quality and the quantity of the information given in tables listing the administrative divisions, their capitals and their location in the vegetation levels (*qolla*, *däga*, *wayna däga*).

Area (km<sup>2</sup>) and population of Ethiopian regions (p. 195)

	aera	population	density
Abyssinia (Tigre, Amhara, Godjam, etc.)	200,000	2,000,000	10
Šäwa	40,000	1,500,000	37
Bogos, Mensas, Beni-Amers, etc.	70,000	100,000	1
Massaouah, Chohos	25,000	50,000	2
Afars, Obok and Assab	100,000	200,000	2
Issas, etc.	15,000	60,000	4
Harrar and neighbouring countries	20,000	1,200,000	60
Galla states of Southern Ethiopia	160,000	3,500,000	22
	630,000	8,610,000	14

Élisée Reclus gave a list of towns which can still be identified today and even the first population estimates for these towns taken from travellers' accounts. It would be possible to draw a map of the administrative grid and to grade these towns according to their population in a longer article.

Estimated populations of Ethiopian towns of the Blue Nile basin (p. 265)

Gondär	4,000	Mahdera Maryam	4,000	Däbrä Tabor	3,000
Amba Maryam	4,000	Däbrä Wärq	3,000	Koharata	1,000
Ifag and Darita	4,000	Dima	2,500		

Estimated populations of Ethiopian towns of the Täckäze and the Red Sea basins (p. 286)

Färäs Saber	2,000	Haläi	2,000	Atsega	1,800	Lalibäla	1,500
Antalo	1,000	Abbi Addi	2,000	Digsan	2,000	Kärän	1,800
Arkiko	1,500	Tchalikout	2,000	Adwa	3,000	Massawa	7,000
Hawzén	1,200	Aksum	5,000	Af Alad	6,000	Addigrat	2,000
Zula	1,000	Kodo Felassi	1,200	Dolka	5,500		



Towns of Eastern Šäwa and of oriental territories with their estimated populations (p. 329)

ŠÄWA		AFARS		EUROPEAN POSSESSIONS	
Ankobär	7,000	Awsa	5,000	Harär (1882)	20,000
Aliyu Amba	4,000	Raheita	2,000	Tadjourah	6,000
Litche	3,000			Zeilah/Seylac	6,000
Angolala	1,000			Asäb	1,300
Däbrä Berhan	2,500				

According to the last three tables Ethiopian towns had a total population of 134,000 inhabitants circa 1880 representing 1.5 % of the population of the country. If we take the ratio between the urban population of the Nile, the Täkkäze and the Red Sea basins and that of Abyssinia, Bogos and Massawa we find twice as many city dwellers. This proportion is lower for Shoa, Harär and Afars and there are no available figures on the Galla states. The most populated town was Harär and then came the ports: Massawa (Məşəwa), Tadjourah and Zeilah. With the exception of Ankobär the capital of Shoa, and Aksum, the religious capital, no town in the hinterland reached 5,000 inhabitants and Gondär which was ruined and abandoned by Tewodros had only 4,000 inhabitants. There is a twofold opposition between North and South and between the hinterland and the coast. The population of the ports was inflated by small settlements of foreigners: Arab, Levantine and sometimes European merchants and teams of French, British, Egyptian and Italian officers leading locally recruited *askaris* in the hope of planting their national flags in the event of a future partition of the country. Harär (under Egyptian rule till 1885) and Ankobär which were or had been both state capitals possessed some political structures.

If we consider current maps (Mesfin, 1971, 1972; Atlas, 1988) and the fact that rural societies have settled for a long time we may assume that the population densities for Abyssinia were under-estimated while they were over-estimated for Shoa. This latter province attracted more foreign visitors than the North since its ruler Mənilək rose to power and began to look for more connections with “nombreux” (a great number of) (p. 297) Europeans. The Egyptian interlude in Harär ensured a more efficient administration which notably increased our information about the region. But Reclus did not have an accurate or complete map coverage at his disposal and had no means of counting the population. Fifty years later Fernand Maurette was no more precise and gave an estimation for the Ethiopian population of about 5 million but covering a larger territory, a significant 3 million loss since 1885 (Maurette, 1938). Were the figures over-estimated in 1885 or were they deliberately under-estimated in 1938 by the Italians? It should probably be viewed as a stagnation period consisting of a quick succession



of ups and downs due to climatic risks, wars and epidemics before the continuous increase known as the “demographic transition” (Gascon, 2006).

#### 4. Reclus, an analyst of the geographical exercise of power on the Highlands

In this short contribution I cannot discuss the conceptions of geography exposed by Reclus in his works. A quotation from *La Terre* (1868) applies to Ethiopia particularly well: “Tous les faits primitifs de l’histoire s’expliquent par la disposition du théâtre géographique sur lequel ils se sont produits: on peut même dire que le développement de l’humanité était inscrit d’avance en caractères grandioses sur les plateaux, les vallées et les rivages de nos continents” (quoted by Nicolas, 1984, p. 50).

Tropical Highlands whether in Ethiopia, in Latin America or in Asia form a particularly well delineated and specific “*théâtre géographique*” for societies. Élisée Reclus wrote: “L’Éthiopie est très diverse à l’intérieur par les découpures de son plateau: son indépendance à l’égard des peuples étrangers et ses incessantes guerres civiles se trouvent ainsi expliquées: la géographie s’accorde avec les traits généraux de l’histoire” (p. 205). Even if Tewodros’s victory in 1855 terminated the *Zämänä Mäsafänt* which had been a long succession of weak sovereigns, throughout his reign fighting did not cease between local dynasties which were settled on the main divisions of the Ethiopian Plateau. When he died in 1868 struggles erupted again with more intensity: the *ras* of Tegräy crowned as Yohannēs IV in 1872 evicted the prince of Goggam and Mäniläk, king of Shoa, who were to look for revenge at the first opportunity. Reclus continued: “Aussi longtemps que les chemins faciles, suivant les crêtes et franchissant les gorges, ne relieront pas les plateaux les uns aux autres et ne donneront pas au pays la cohésion qui lui manque, l’Éthiopie sera condamnée au régime féodal” (p. 251). The Italians understood this perfectly when they devoted 85 % of the budget of *Africa Orientale Italiana* to build a road network radiating from Addis Abäba. Nevertheless the feeling of belonging to these main divisions separated by the deep valleys of the Nile tributaries lingers on (Donham, 1986). Thus in Tegräy those who are regarded as the true natives of the country are still called: “children of our rivers” (Gebbru, 1991, p. 218). Reclus explained at length the historical and religious origins of the divisions within Ethiopia while he showed how these factors of division could also become factors of unity against foreigners or invaders. But the Salomonic myth did not prevent the: “mélanges de race [...] variant du type négrien à celui des blancs d’Europe” (p. 241). He often mentioned in his footnotes the migrations of Bantu, Hamitic and even Khoisan “races” although he did not go into the same details as many authors did later.

### 5. Can Élisée Reclus's work provide arguments for present conflicts?

Élisée Reclus plays a part in the present disputes which are tearing Ethiopians apart or in the conflict between Ethiopians and Eritreans. He wrote: "l'amhariña (*sic*) est le langage du commerce et de la diplomatie; il est aussi l'idiome littéraire" and he added with cruelty: "Quant aux dialectes tigrīña (*sic*), ils n'ont aucune littérature" (p. 240). He continued: "l'amhariña [est] le plus envahissant, grâce à la supériorité de civilisation qui appartient aux habitants de l'Amhara et à leur prépondérance politique" (p. 240). The first part of this sentence would cause a scandal nowadays but in the second part Reclus corrected his statement by putting it in its historical context.

Élisée Reclus could supply arguments to the protagonists in the border conflicts had he not written: "Le roi d'Abyssinie n'est maître que du sol sur lequel campe son armée et des villes largement ouvertes où ses cavaliers peuvent se montrer à la moindre alerte" (p. 251). In the South there were no clear limits before Mənilək ordered to build fortresses (*kātāma*) in order to control his conquests (Gascon, 1989). But in the North, Reclus did not hesitate: the Barka river gorge is the "Thermopyles d'Éthiopie" (p. 206) and further on: "Dans l'Éthiopie proprement dite, qui commence par le plateau de Hamasen" (p. 208). However the capital of this region which is one of the three təgrāñña-speaking Eritrean provinces is none other than Asmāra, the capital of present day Eritrea. It is worth to remember what Reclus wrote earlier: "ce sont les armées du 'roi des rois' qui en marquent les limites [de l'Éthiopie]" (p. 194). And at the time the sovereign was still a "political nomad" (A. Rouaud) who moved together with his army, the *Abuna*, his Court and his borders. Thus when the *ras* of Təgray, following Yohannəs's order, went North to fight the Egyptian garrisons at Kassala and Məṣəwa from where they had tried many times to conquer Hamasen, Reclus pointed out that the Egyptians returned the port to the British who gave it to the Italians in 1885. It was only long after the publication of the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*, after Mənilək's accession to power, the establishment of a fixed capital and the battle of Adwa (1896) that signed agreements started to establish fixed borders.

Nor can Reclus's views be argued in the Oromo question today: "Dans le pays des Ill-Orma vivent aussi des populations d'autre origine parlant un idiome différent non encore recueilli par les missionnaires: ce sont évidemment les restes des populations vaincues formant dans la masse envahissante de la nation galla comme des îlots ethnologiques. En plein pays orômo se sont aussi maintenus quelques groupes d'Amhariniens ayant conservé la langue éthiopienne" (p. 306). These sentences could have served as an introduction to *Being and becoming Oromo* (Baxter, Hultin, Triulzi, 1996), a book with a

revealing title. Élisée Reclus took his information from good sources: the d'Abbadie brothers and Massaïa who founded Oromo studies. He mentioned the general features which have made the specificity of this people up to now: the belief in *Waaqaa*, the *abdar* cult, the *qallicha*, the *zar*<sup>11</sup> and the conversion of the Wällo to Islam (pp. 309–310) but he did not give much credit to the phantasmagorical theory of a Gallic/Breton origin of the Galla (Salviac, 1902). In the chapter on Šäwa Reclus showed that this upper region between the Nile and the Awaš basins was inhabited by both Oromo and Amhara. He described it as: “[une] contrée à climat tempéré où la terre, mieux cultivée qu’en toute autre région d’Éthiopie” (p. 306). Thus he was expressing the over-optimistic impressions of European travellers, adventurers, traffickers or ... missionaries who were gathering round Mənilək, King of Shoa. They thought they could use him as their Trojan Horse in Ethiopia while he only sought to free himself from Yohannəs’s supervision by buying weapons and techniques from Europeans. One can even think that Reclus felt the importance which Finfini/Addis Abäba was to take later (p. 293, p. 330, p. 331).

#### What can be learned from Élisée Reclus?

Reading Élisée Reclus is a profitable exercise: he never gave up his convictions and never sacrificed the scientific quality of his work. A few details and facts are out of date and some interpretations are obsolete but thanks to an enormous amount of work and to his talent as a writer he achieved a remarkable geographical synthesis. The few quotations in this article give only a short glimpse of his descriptive talent. His readings and his culture made Reclus aware that Ethiopia was a highly populated stronghold and fortress which had in its cultural personality and history rooted in the Highlands all the factors enabling it to resist aggressions and assimilation. He had the wisdom not to embark himself on the racist-linguistic fantasies of his contemporaries who only had colonization in mind. He was aware that Šäwa although far from the Abyssinian core was nearer to the coast and therefore had a promising future. Like Rimbaud, his contemporary, he took an interest in a link between Obock and Šäwa and mentioned a possible railway thus anticipating the Djibouti to Addis Abäba project.

Let us pay a deserved tribute to our illustrious forerunners who had to use fragmentary, incomplete and biased data to construct Ethiopian Studies.

<sup>11</sup> *Zar* is widely practiced by a wide range of peoples in the Horn of Africa.

## Résumé

Dans le volume X de la *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*, publié en 1885, Reclus consacre un long chapitre à l'Éthiopie. Alors qu'il n'est jamais allé en Afrique, il écrit la première analyse géographique pertinente de cette région. Il ne se contente pas de dresser un tableau des connaissances à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle mais annonce, le premier, la montée en puissance du Šäwa que Mənilək conduit à la conquête des hautes terres du Sud.

## Summary

In volume X of the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* published in 1885 Reclus dealt at length with Ethiopia. Although he never visited Africa he wrote the first relevant geographical analysis of this region. He did not only list the descriptions and ideas prevalent at the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century but he was the first to predict the rise of Šäwa which Mənilək was later to lead into the conquest of the Southern Highlands.

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